

Religious Studies Department

The Department of Religious Studies specializes in the study of Buddhism and comparative religion, offering both an MA and PhD in Religious Studies. In addition to their teaching mission, faculty are involved in various research projects, including detailed study of Chinese-, Sanskrit-, and Pali-language Buddhist texts and the study of Asian religions in the contemporary world. The Religious Studies Department works closely with other departments, particularly Buddhist Chaplaincy and Psychology, providing a bridge between the study of religion—past, present, and future—and the problems of modern life.

Philosophy & Objectives

Through the study of religion students acquire a deep understanding of religious practices, ideas, outlooks, and concerns that have influenced and continue to influence human culture and existence. Asian religious traditions, particularly Buddhism, provide the core focus and foundation of the program. The department is dedicated to open academic inquiry and religious diversity and committed to fostering an environment that furthers religious understanding between East and West. Students from all religious backgrounds are encouraged to bring their own unique and enriching perspective to the study of religion.

Master of Arts in Religious Studies

The Master of Arts in Religious Studies is a two-year, full-time degree program that allows students to gain a critical appreciation and understanding of different facets of religion. More specifically, it seeks to extend a student's background in Buddhism and Buddhist Studies, with an emphasis on practical applications in the contemporary world.

UWest offers four optional concentrations in its master's degree program. First, students may specialize in Buddhist Texts & Translation. This concentration equips students with the canonical language skills and methodological approaches to translate and interpret key Buddhist texts. Second, students may specialize in Comparative Religion. This emphasis allows students to explore and investigate different religions, including a working knowledge of at least two religious traditions. Third, students may select the concentration in Humanistic Buddhism. This emphasis develops and promotes a humanistic and socially aware understanding of the world based on Buddhist wisdom and values. Fourth, students may pursue the concentration in Mindfulness, Meditation, & Mind. This pathway allows students to explore and investigate the Buddhist foundations of spiritual cultivation within the broader context of contemplative practice.

Students who choose not to select a concentration may develop, in close consultation with a faculty advisor, a course of study of their own design tailored to their own interests and needs.

Program Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete the MA in Religious Studies program will be able to:

- Summarize, explain, and discuss historical and contemporary Buddhist practices, traditions, ideas, and perspectives.
- Identify and utilize appropriate frameworks and methodologies germane to the study of religion.
- Critically evaluate arguments arising from different forms and traditions of religious expression.
- Produce scholarly writing that reflect adherence to ethical academic standards.
- Describe the value of academic study of religion in relation to their personal and professional lives.

Concentration Learning Outcomes

- Students who successfully complete the Buddhist Texts & Translation concentration will be able to use canonical language skills and appropriate methodological approaches to translate and interpret key Buddhist texts in canonical languages.
- Students who successfully complete the Comparative Religion concentration will be able to explain and discuss at least two major religious traditions and be able to offer a comparative analysis.
- Students who successfully complete the Humanistic Buddhism concentration will be able to explain and discuss a humanistic and socially-aware worldview based on Buddhist Wisdom and values.
- Students who successfully complete the Mindfulness, Meditation, & Mind concentration will be able to explain and discuss the Buddhist foundations of spiritual cultivation within the context of contemplative practice.

Program Requirements

Area	Required Units
Core Courses	6
Concentration	21
Electives	9
Total	36

Core Courses: 6 units required

During the first two semesters, all students complete the core courses below. Students will acquire knowledge of the tools and theories used for the advanced academic study of religion. A minimum grade of B is required for each core course. Students who do not earn a B or higher in a core course may repeat that course one time only to achieve a passing grade.

Courses	Units
REL 600 History & Theory of the Study of Religion	3
REL 607 Research Methods	3

Electives: 9 units required

Students select 3 graduate level courses (9 units) not applied to other requirements. Must include one course to satisfy the religious diversity requirement. A minimum grade of C (2.0) is required for each elective course applied to graduation.

One course per semester may be taken at an approved collegiate partner such as the Claremont School of Theology. Students acquire knowledge and research and writing skills in their chosen area of emphasis or focus.

Concentration: 21 units required

Students complete 21 units. A minimum grade of B is required in all courses applied to graduation.

Concentration Declared: Students who declare a concentration select courses from courses listed under that concentration.

No Concentration: Students who choose not to declare a concentration select courses across concentrations, in consultation with faculty.

Buddhist Texts & Translation Concentration: 21 units required

Equips students with the classical language skills and methodological approaches to translate and interpret key Buddhist texts.

Canonical Language Training: Complete 6 units minimum in one or more of the following languages; more units are recommended

Classical Chinese

Pali

Sanskrit

Tibetan

Texts: Complete 15 units from the following:

Courses	Units
REL 540 Buddhist Hermeneutics	3
REL 630* Seminar: Buddhist Texts in Canonical Languages	3
REL 636* Seminar: Buddhist Texts in Translation	3
REL 645* Seminar: Regional Buddhist Traditions	3

*Topical courses may be taken a maximum of three times for credit with advisor approval.

Comparative Religion Concentration: 21 units required

Develops and promotes a comparative understanding of different religions, and specifically cultivates a working knowledge of at least two religious traditions.

Complete seven courses from the following list, including one concentration core and six electives.

Courses	Units
Comparative Religion Core: complete concentration core class listed here	
REL 590 Comparative Study of Religion	3
Comparative Religion Electives: select six courses below	
REL 515 Religions of China	3
REL 520 Religions of India	3
REL 592 Myth & Mythology	3
REL 610 Seminar: Religion & Ethics	3
REL 640 Topics in Comparative Religion	3
REL 660 Seminar: Buddhist-Christian Dialogue	3
MDIV 540 Sacred Abrahamic Texts in Spiritual Care & Counseling	3
MDIV 530 Interfaith Rituals for Chaplaincy	3

Humanistic Buddhism Concentration: 21 units required:

Develops and promotes an engaged and socially aware understanding of the world based on Buddhist wisdom and values.

Complete 7 courses from the following list

Courses	Units
REL 505 Women in Buddhism	3
REL 506 Buddhism & Gender	3
REL 521 Buddhist Meditation Practicum	3
REL 585 Religion & Environmentalism	3
REL 636 Seminar: Buddhist Texts in Translation	3
REL 639 Topics in the Study of Religion	3
REL 641 Topics in Buddhist Studies	3
REL 645 Seminar: Regional Buddhist Traditions	3
REL 655 Perspectives in the Study of Chan/Zen Buddhism	3
REL 657 Humanistic Buddhism & Current Issues	3
REL 659 Buddhism in the US	3
REL 670 Spread of Buddhism to Central Asia & China	3
REL 671 Buddhism & Globalization	3

Mindfulness, Meditation, & Mind Concentration: 21 units required

Explores and investigates the Buddhist foundations of spiritual cultivation within the broader context of contemplative practice.

Complete 7 courses from the following list (21 units):

Courses	Units
CONT 510 Topics in Comparative Contemplative Practice	3
CONT 520 Topics in Contemplative Practice	3
CONT 540 Contemplation: Pali Canon	3
CONT 550 Contemplation: Chinese Canon	3
CONT 560 Contemplation: Tibetan Canon	3
CONT 599 Directed Reading & Research	3
PSYCH 617 Application of Mindfulness in Western Therapy	3
REL 521 Buddhist Meditation Practicum	3
REL 530 Topics in Buddhist Meditation	3

Optional PhD Preparation Track

For students planning to pursue further academic study and apply to a doctoral-level program, the following components are optional, although highly recommended. These courses can be applied toward graduation.

Language: Students may pursue up to 12 units of language study as part of their overall coursework. Language study is recommended during the first year of coursework or as soon as the relevant courses are offered.

Thesis Project: Students may enroll in the 3-unit course REL 700 Thesis Project at the outset of the semester in which they intend to write and submit their thesis. They select a relevant research subject in consultation with the professor supervising their project. The thesis must be at least 50 double-spaced pages in length (excluding the title page, abstract, and bibliography). The master's candidate must have a thesis committee approved by the department chair prior to the end of the semester during which REL 700 Thesis Project is taken. This committee is composed of three faculty members, including the student's advisor. With the approval of their advisor and the department chair, students may choose to pursue an alternative to the traditional thesis (e.g. publishable article, multimedia project).

The final version of the thesis or comparable project must be formatted according to university guidelines and submitted to the library before the end of the term in which the student is graduating. Students receive 3 units of thesis credit, applicable to the concentration requirement, when the thesis is accepted by the library.

Students may enroll in REL 700 for a second subsequent semester only with the approval of the thesis committee and department chair. Thesis must be submitted to and accepted by the library no later than the close of the second semester enrolled in REL 700. Repeated units are not applicable to graduation.

A student who fails to meet the submission deadline is not eligible for thesis credit.

Graduation Requirements

Students are expected to complete graduation requirements in a timely manner and to maintain good standing.

Students must complete course and program requirements as listed for a total of 36 units with a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0. A minimum grade of B is required for core and concentration courses and a minimum grade of C or P for elective courses applied to graduation. Students who do not earn a passing grade as specified may repeat that course one time only to achieve a passing grade. All coursework must be at the graduate level; graduate courses previously applied to a bachelor's degree cannot be applied to graduation.

Degrees are awarded at the close of the semester in which all coursework has been completed, the thesis has been accepted by the library (if applicable), the Petition to Graduate form has been filed with the registrar's office, and the graduation fee has been paid.

Credit Limits: Students may apply no more than 6 units (two courses) of Directed Reading & Research and 6 units (two courses) of independent study towards graduation. Students are allowed no more than 12 units of unfinished coursework (i.e. incompletes and withdrawals) over the duration of the program.

Transfer Credit: Up to 6 units may be fulfilled through the transfer of graduate credit from another institution. Students are required to complete their final 6 units in attendance at UWest. Any pre-approved transfer work must be completed with a minimum grade of B (3.0) prior to the last day of the student's last term in attendance at UWest.

Time to Degree Standards

Full Time: Students who enroll full-time in this program are expected to complete their degree in two years (four semesters). Any request for an extension of the time to degree must be submitted through a General Petition and approved by the chair. The maximum time to degree allowed after all approved extensions is four years.

Part Time: Students who intend to enroll on a part-time basis must meet with the chair to develop an appropriate standard and timeline. This timeline may not exceed four years.

Students should be aware that a failure to meet time to degree standards may result in loss of visa eligibility and/or funding support or in dismissal from the program.